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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

MAKING AN ARMY CHANGE

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Making An Army Change

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We are going to roll our sleeves up and get on with transforming the most respected Army in the world into a strategically responsive force that is dominate across the full spectrum of operations.
Doing so will alter the national security environment.¹

With the above announcement on October 12th, 1999, General Eric K. Shinseki, the new Army Chief of Staff, set the Army on a radically different course than it has followed for over 50 years. The Army would start this fiscal year to transform its heavy and light brigades into a medium-weight structure that would allow it to be air deployed anywhere in the world in 96 hours, a division on the ground in 120 hours, and five divisions in 30 days.² No further study, no further waiting. Do it now!

This decision to do it immediately was made in spite of the Army war fighting successes of Desert Storm ... in spite of the increasing hostility posed by the post-cold war ... and in spite of its responsibility to simultaneously fight two major theater wars in the world. The decision was also made knowing, full well, that the former Army Chief of Staff, GEN Dennis J. Reimer, had already set the Army on a slower, more deliberate process of experimentation in changing the Army. Most surprisingly, the decision was made knowing that a similar change proposed 20 years ago by then Army Chief of Staff, GEN Edward Meyer, had failed miserably.³

Why the rush to change our Army? Was this decision truly the rational act of a visionary responding quickly to the future as he sees it, or was it fueled and hurried by the process of governmental politics? I contend that it was more the latter. In this paper I will explore and analyze three important aspects of the national security process that influenced the new Army Chief of Staff, GEN Shinseki, to make the decision to start now, and not later, to fundamentally change the Army from a heavy-weight force to a lighter, more deployable, and more lethal

medium-weight force.

- The Influence of Congress and the Power of the Purse. What were senators and congressman telling the Army? What was the funding outlook?
- The Role of Inter-Service Competition for Missions and Legitimacy. Is the traditional fight between services reaching a crescendo over limited defense funds and who should be “called upon first” by the Nation?
- The Timing of the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and 2000 Elections.⁴ Did these two upcoming events fuel the drive to change now? Was the window of opportunity closing?

Some Background On The Timing of Change

GEN Shinseki announced his vision to change the Army less than four months after taking over as the new Army Chief of Staff -- not much time for contemplating such a momentous decision. Certainly, his tenure the preceding year as the Army Vice Chief of Staff and the year before as Commander in Chief of U.S. Army Europe (USAEUR), to include all peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, had prepared him well. He, like most other senior leaders, knew the Army was destined for change in this post-cold war era ...was well aware of the pressures pushing it to change ... and knew that a medium-weight force held the best promise. GEN Shinseki also had seen, first hand, the mismatched capabilities of light and heavy forces trying to perform their missions in Bosnia.⁵ So, the real question, when he assumed office, was not if the Army was going to change, but when and how fast.

Herein lies the most difficult challenge: making such a dramatic change now when the Army budget is already straining; when Army personnel are daily reeling from a 300% increase in operating tempo (OPTEMPO); and when the Army has suffered a 37% decline of

endstrength.⁶ It presented a gargantuan undertaking, full of dangers and risks. Even the Secretary of the Army, Louis Caldera, conceded that it's like "changing a tire while traveling 70 miles an hour."⁷

The previous Army Chief of Staff, GEN Dennis J. Reimer, didn't think it was possible to "change that tire" at such a speed. He wanted to slow it down first and his vision for changing the Army reflected it -- slow and cautious. In *Strategic Review*, printed just last spring, GEN Reimer restated the Army plan for change which "adopted a process of experimentation and development beginning in 1994 called Force XXI" to redesign the Army by 2010, but not earlier.⁸ The Army would first concentrate on setting up a new brigade-level headquarters element called Strike Force. Strike Force would eventually be made "into a medium-weight type force" to meet the quick responses needed in places like Bosnia and Kosovo.⁹

GEN Reimer had good reasons for believing the pace of change could not be rushed. First, it might interfere with current operations. In repeated testimony to Congress and to others, he stated "We can't afford to stand down the Army in order to modernize it. The Army can't take time out from readiness."¹⁰ Second, he contended that the Army literally couldn't afford to change any quicker. "Yes, there are people who think we should be moving quicker. They must understand there is only one [budget] trade-off available to the Army that we can make: Endstrength vs. Modernization. First, we must take care of people (quality of life)."¹¹ In other words, if the Army modernizes or changes any faster, it will have to cut personnel and the quality of life to pay for it, and then the Army won't be able to meet its current missions and the national military strategy. There must be balance -- this was the big dilemma.

There is little question that GEN Reimer's slower plan for change was the rational approach. Even GEN Shinseki echoed it October 1998 while USAEUR Commander. In an article he wrote for *Army* magazine, he stated "We must bring the emerging Force XXI

initiatives to Europe and employ them.” However, he cautioned “At the same time, we must not loose sight of the need to maintain balance -- the key to readiness is our commitment to the well being of our people.”¹² Did most in the Army understand and support the Army’s approach? Yes, but the dynamics of governmental politics were taking charge. GEN Shinseki’s revised assessment, “We are going for capability and not study.”¹³ We can’t afford to wait, we must do it now. Why?

The Influence of Congress and the Power of the Purse

Never underestimate the influence of Congress to shape the Armed Forces to best serve the Nation’s interests, as they see fit. That responsibility is derived directly from the Constitution which gives them the power “to raise and support Armies.”¹⁴ The “power of the purse” is a wonderful, deliberate gift from the framers. It can build an Army, it can dismantle an Army, and it can fundamentally change an Army. Congress has never been reluctant to use it.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated and the cold war was won on December 25th, 1991, Congress wasted no time in exacting a “peace dividend” by reducing the size of the Army commensurate with the perceived reduction in threat. The Army’s annual budget was reduced from 113 billion dollars in 1991 to 65 billion dollars in 1999; its endstrength reduced 37% from 760,000 to 480,000 in personnel; and its structure was dismantled from 18 active divisions to a “base force” of only 12 divisions, and then to 10 divisions.¹⁵ This was all done, as Senator Sam Nunn (Democrat, Georgia) put it, while serving as Chairman of the Senate Armed Services

Committee (SASC), “to link the changing world environment to a new military strategy for the post-cold war era.”¹⁶

When the Services couldn’t get their act together five years earlier and perform

cohesively in a joint environment, as evident by the disjointed execution of the Granada invasion and the failed, embarrassing Desert One operation in Iran, Congress stepped in then too and legislated it. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 greatly enhanced the power of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and mandated joint assignments linked to promotion to flag rank.¹⁷ This fundamentally changed the relationship between services and vastly improved inter-service cooperation and joint operations. Congress has found that it often takes civilian leadership to get the Armed Forces to change, even when the Services know they need to change.

So, did Congress step in and influence GEN Shinseki to start the change now, versus later? Yes, the evidence is very compelling that it did. There has always been pressure on the Army to fundamentally change its cold war structure, but this year it took a more ominous, more threatening tone. Last March the SASC held hearings on Army Modernization and pushed hard for the Army to transform itself to the challenges of a post-cold war environment where fast responses to a crisis are needed, such as in Haiti, Somalia, Kosovo, and East Timor. GEN Reimer was “called on the carpet” and pressed to start the change now.

GEN Reimer Under Attack

Senator Joseph Lieberman (Democrat, Connecticut) of the SASC led the assault with Senators Jack Reed (Democrat, Rhode Island) and John Warner (Republican, Virginia) supporting, saying “that the Army is still considered an overly large and heavy force, which may become less relevant to emerging 21st Century threats.”¹⁸ Its heavy divisions are difficult to deploy and are costly to operate and maintain in both dollars and manpower. All true, in fact, the Army’s armored divisions have become heavier by 20% since 1989.¹⁹ The increase has now reached a ridiculous point where only a single M1 Abrams tank (or one future Crusader artillery vehicle) can be deployed on a C-17 aircraft.²⁰ When it arrives, it uses 494 gallons of fuel per

day to run. That's why it took six months to deploy the heavy forces needed for Desert Storm. The Army's light forces, such as the 82nd Airborne Division, can deploy much quicker, but lack firepower, ground mobility, and staying power.²¹ They were a "speed bump" for the Iraqis during Desert Storm and would have been out-gunned and out-maneuvered in Kosovo.

The SASC went further and cited "These [heavy and light forces] come at the expense of investing in critical R&D needed to rapidly move to the Army After Next."²² Senator Lieberman followed with the ultimate warning to the Army, "If the Army doesn't rethink its strategy very soon, it will not only be unable to afford to modernize the force structure, but it will not be able to pursue the transformation process which is critical in preparing for future threats."²³ Defense funding was limited and it wasn't expected to increase in any large degree in the future to fund a transformation. Even the House side echoed these sentiments with Representative Jim Gibbons (Republican, Nevada) of the HASC saying the "Defense budget is the big target right now"²⁴ for social agenda issues. In other words, tough choices need to be made if the Army is going to be relevant in the future.

For Congress, the time was running out for the Army. The SASC told GEN Reimer point-blank that his future vision to change the Army by establishing medium Strike Force headquarters elements "is too slow and not being implemented as robustly as it should be."²⁵ To them, "it is a priority"²⁶ to change right away. GEN Reimer, with only two months left as the Army's Chief of

Staff, maintained his position that the only trade-off was between endstrength and modernization.²⁷ There must be balance; the Army can't go any quicker.

This hearing sent a wake-up call to senior Army leaders. The hard reality was the Army could no longer afford its cautious, deliberate approach to change -- "either in terms of the fiscal cost today or the risk it poses to security tomorrow."²⁸ A Brigade medium-weight force

of 5,000 troops could be deployed on one-tenth the number of C-17 sorties required of a heavy force and at about the same fraction of cost to sustain it.²⁹ Making the decision to transition now would make the Army relevant and give it a better shot at limited defense dollars to make it happen. This force would also have the added benefit of being cheaper in the long run to operate.

If the Army couldn't show it was moving now to be relevant, the service that did would get the lions share of funds. As the Army's incoming Chief and current Vice, GEN Shinseki must have felt the heat from this "shot across the bow" from Congress -- or was it from the light of an Air Force laser-guided bomb.

The Role of Inter-Service Competition for Missions and Legitimacy

The Army's legitimacy was not only being challenged by Congress, but also from its sister services. Such rivalry is expected and usually taken in stride, but this time it really stung because it might have merit.

The Air Force began questioning the Army's legitimacy intensely after their highly successful air campaign in Desert Storm. During this conflict, air power surprisingly reduced the need for a ground campaign to only 100 hours. As a result, Air Force leadership questioned the need for a large, heavy force Army and used it to lobby for a bigger piece of the Department of Defense (DOD) budget pie (or at least maintain the big piece they already had). Air Force rivalry reached a fever pitch just before the first Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) which was conducted in 1997. Through this QDR process, DOD conducts a "bottom-up review" to determine the optimal force structure, endstrength and modernization it needs of the services in meeting anticipated threats to national security.³⁰

Just before QDR 1997, then Air Force Chief of Staff, GEN Ronald R. Foglemann, said in a speech, "The need for mass on the battlefield has now changed. We don't need to occupy an

enemy's country to defeat his strategy. We can reduce his combat capabilities and defeat his armed forces from the air.”³¹ This speech drew national attention to Air Force primacy.

Although the Army vigorously countered this argument, the Air Force was given a surprisingly large share of the DOD budget following the QDR. Excluding what DOD staff retains for its own programs and functions, the Air Force received over 35% and the Army received only 28%. This was obviously unnerving to the Army, especially when it represented one-third of the Armed Forces and handled 60% of military participation in deployments.³²

Today, the air campaign in Kosovo is being heralded as the first time in history a war was won by bombing alone.³³ Many pundits and officers inside and out of the Air Force are now aggressively claiming the vindication of GEN Foglemann’s statement in 1996 that wars can now be won by air power alone. To add insult to injury, the Army sat helplessly on the sidelines throughout the Kosovo conflict. Its powerful Task Force Hawk of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters and supporting ground troops were deployed late, were not used, and were a big “political loser” for heavy forces.³⁴

Now, the other land service has gotten into the legitimacy game in a big way. GEN Charles C. Krulak, while serving as Marine Corps Commandant in 1998, testified on underfunding before the SASC that the Marines are “the Nation’s 911 force into the 21st Century,” not the Army. He then warned Congress that it was wasting valuable resources on “weapons and equipment designed to win on the cold war battlefield.”³⁵ A clear shot at the Army’s heavy division structure. Senator John McCain (Republican, Arizona), a SASC member, former Navy pilot, and 1999 presidential candidate, intensified this land power rivalry recently by stating “There is clearly overlap between the Marine Corps versus the Army, I especially would have challenged the Army’s proposition that it needs even 10 divisions. I find it ludicrous.”³⁶

Even the Navy has jumped into the land grab. It recently unveiled “the development of a

new approach to naval operations” which places “unprecedented emphasis” on projecting power and forces on land.³⁷ Having somewhat redeemed the legitimacy of its air arm (carriers) and sea arm (cruise missiles platforms) in Kosovo, it’s now advertising and institutionalizing its effectiveness on controlling land ashore. The Navy is posturing to best argue its relevance for the 21st Century and for a bigger share of the limited DOD budget pie (which is already much bigger than the Army’s).

The Nation’s premiere land force, the Army, is now in a fight for survival. The rivalry with the other services for legitimacy and missions is reaching a lethal crescendo -- unlike anything the Army has experienced before. Senior Army leaders acknowledge it and are responding. The Secretary of the Army stated recently “We concede no mission to anyone, from initial entry to high intensity conflict.”³⁸ Even GEN Shinseki, soon after taking office as Chief, felt he had to respond, “We intend to get to trouble spots faster than our adversaries can complicate the crisis.”³⁹ A warning, many insist, that was meant for its sister services, as well as, an enemy.

The Timing of the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and 2000 Elections

The next QDR could be disastrous for the Army. An influential study done by the Rand Corporation, entitled “The Case for Medium-Weight Forces,” has given added urgency to this notion. “It is likely that the other services will attempt to victimize the Army during the next QDR - arguing that the Army is less relevant to expeditionary warfare.”⁴⁰ If the Army didn’t act soon, the other services would act for it. The Army would have absolutely no influence in increasing its endstrength, force structure, or getting a bigger piece of the DOD budget pie to make its transformation. Senator Lieberman summed it up recently when he said “In the

process of military transformation, there will be winners and losers.”⁴¹ The Army was loosing -- the next QDR was only 18 months away in 2001 -- time was running out.

If the situation wasn’t bleak enough for the Army, the 1999 Presidential and Congressional elections were coming even faster, making it even bleaker. Soon this constitutional process would draw the attention of lawmakers and DOD appointees elsewhere making it harder to argue the Army’s case for relevancy as QDR 2001 drew closer. To make matters even worse, the leading Republican presidential candidate, who many feel will win the election, Texas Governor George W. Bush, was already calling for radical reforms of the Armed Forces. In fact, he attacked the Army head-on publicly proposing “that the Army stop building heavy tanks ... and invest in future high-tech systems that can be deployed quickly.”⁴²

It was now clear, if the Army was going to have a chance, it had to act before the election campaign flew into high gear - which most concur is one year from the election on November 7, 2000. So, the Army had even less time. If it was going to succeed, it had to do something before November 1999.

On October 12, 1999 the new Chief of Staff, GEN Shinseki, acted. He announced that the Army would start the change now. “As quickly as we can, we will acquire vehicle prototypes, in order to stand up the first [medium-weight brigade] units at Fort Lewis, Washington.”⁴³ One light and one heavy brigade would be transformed. They would “include lighter armored vehicles, combat units fully staffed for no-notice emergencies, with less spare parts and other supplies ...”⁴⁴ He then announced the time table. The change would start this fiscal year and both brigades would be fully trained and deployable by the year 2001.⁴⁵

This action was visible, it was real, it was something you could literally put your hands on. More importantly, it was this year and it would help the Army make a better “strategic

and political” case for more resources in the next QDR. These brigades would also allow the Army to compete effectively with the other services for missions when a 911 call came.

The Process Is Far From Over

Yes, the writing was clearly on the wall. The politics of government made a full court press on the Army and GEN Shinseki to switch from its rational, slow, deliberate approach to changing right now. Congress made it clear that its legitimacy as a service was in question and that there were few, if any, extra dollars to be had for transformation. The Air Force, Marines, and Navy made it clear that they would lend merit to the Army’s failing legitimacy in order to get those few extra dollars plus any more they could lift from the Army’s current share of the DOD budget during the next QDR. It was also clear from looking at the clock that time was running out. The 2001 QDR and 2000 elections were coming fast. It was now or never. The politics of the situation dictated the timing, not the Army.

GEN Shinseki responded and made the only decision he could make. Four months after taking office, he directed the Army to start now in transforming its light and heavy brigades to lighter, more deployable, and more cost-effective medium-weight brigades. He may well be a visionary, but his decision to make his Army change today shows he is clearly a pragmatist.

But what about the “balance” that GEN Reimer and even GEN Shinseki once held so dear? What about the impact of “doing it now” on personnel and quality of life? GEN Shinseki is making the tough choices that Congress, his sister services, and looming events say he must do. But to ease the burden on soldiers and families as much as possible, GEN Shinseki is dramatically cutting back on two top priority, big-ticket weapon procurements to pay for this transformation in the short term -- the Crusader artillery vehicle and the Comanche helicopter.⁴⁶ These savings

will help alleviate reducing endstrength to pay for transformation for the moment. It also forestalls increasing the operating OPTEMPO for the moment (doing the same missions with less people). The Army is now emphasizing that “everything is on the table” to ease this burden until it can get increased DOD funding.⁴⁷

A Warning: GEN Shinseki recognized in his announcement that “I suspect that moving this quickly will be unnerving to some.”⁴⁸ This was a vast understatement. Although the Senate took the big picture, long term view in pushing the Army to change now, it will certainly take the small picture, “not with my state” view when the Army starts to execute and wants to pay for it. The impact on reducing acquisitions of Crusaders, Comanche’s, M1 Abrams tanks, and other heavy vehicles will directly affect jobs and industry on a grand scale -- drawing fire from every senator and congressman in whose district they reside. The real process has only begun. The Army could still fail, even though it wants to be relevant, and is trying its best to respond to the process.

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